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ABSTRACT

Students' motivation for studying French and German can be increased by exposure to the foreign culture and society through audio and video cassettes. Preparation is similar for both kinds of recording, except that with the video aspect absent from audio tapes, students must use their own imaginations to visualize the action. When students are interested in what they hear, they work harder to build necessary vocabulary. As a result, students' listening, speaking, and reading skills develop faster than if they were exposed only to written language. At the intermediate level, much preparation is necessary for audio or video cassette use. First, copyright permission is needed. A vocabulary list and notes must then be made; some tapes have accompanying transcripts or texts. An audio tape read slowly in one- or two-word segments for repetition practice must be made and put on reserve for student use. Students then practice repeating longer segments of the original recording, and finally hear the entire recording. In the case of video recordings, students then see the whole video cassette. Discussion follows. Experience shows that students enjoy and are motivated by the recordings. Active discussions occur in and out of class. For less verbal students, activities to stimulate participation can be found. (MSE)

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USE OF RADIO PLAYS AND VIDEO TAPES IN INTERMEDIATE FRENCH AND GERMAN CLASSES

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The aim is to increase students' motivation for studying French and German by exposing them to the foreign culture and society through audio and video cassettes. Preparation is essentially the same for both kinds of tapes, except that with the visual aspect absent from audio tapes, students have to use their own imaginations to visualize the action, which is like listening to a play behind a closed door. When they are interested in what they see and hear, they are willing to work harder in order to build up the vocabulary necessary to understand and communicate content in simple language. As a result, their listening, speaking, and writing skills increase considerably faster than if they had been exposed to the language only by reading books. It is also evident that audio-visual comprehension of the foreign culture and language is a more effective teaching tool in our time than reading foreign language texts. We must not forget that at the end of the twentieth century people read few books but learn what they choose from the mass media, particularly television, and that educational television is a legitimate and essential part of the educational system.

For foreign language teachers the question is why do we not make more use of the TV screen in our classes, except for advanced students? To these students we have shown French and German films for years because we conducted the classes in the original languages. There is no communication problem because students are able to function in the language, films or audio tapes are discussed as are grammar and idioms, and there is also role playing.

The situation is quite different in intermediate foreign language classes. Without extensive preparation, students have to view foreign films or video tapes with subtitles in English and are frustrated because they lack sufficient comprehension skills. Numerous questions and discussions have to take place in very simple terms or English. In other words, it is primarily a visual experience, that often takes place in France or Germany, with an English translation.

Much work has to be done to prepare the students for an audio or video cassette in a foreign language without translation. First, we have to get permission from the copyright holder to make a copy of the film, which may or may not be easy. With this accomplished, we can then proceed with our preparations.

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I find that the following method has worked:

1. An audio and a video tape have to be made.

2. The teacher has to prepare a vocabulary list and notes to explain idioms and grammar. The vocabulary list contains only words above the approximately 700 - 900 words on the word frequency lists commonly learned in basic language courses and expected to be known by the student at the beginning of the intermediate course. If necessary, these words can be reviewed.

Please note that the text of some audio and video materials is available in print. The students are asked to write vocabulary lists and to study them.

In a few cases, audio tapes are graded, edited and published for class use, such as "Voix et Silences" and "Mensch und Zeit", both edited by myself, with introductions, vocabulary and footnotes.

Available also are films on video tape made specifically for language teaching, with accompanying text books or study guides.

3. When tapes are not prepared for student use, the teacher has to provide an audio tape of the vocabulary over the first 700 words in the high frequency lists.

4. Students study the vocabulary and accompanying audio tape of the vocabulary.

5. An audio tape, read slowly by one speaker, in sections of two or three words, with pauses for repetition, has to be made and put on reserve in the language laboratory for student use. During the pauses, the student has to repeat orally and/or in writing, what he hears.

6. Subsequently, students listen to the original tape, which can be stopped and started again (by pushing the pause button and the pause button release) at short intervals. These pauses allow them to repeat orally or in writing what they have just heard.

It is a good idea to provide a transcript of the video tape so that students can correct mistakes and add what they have missed.

Finally, they hear and understand the audio cassette as it is. Discussion of the audio cassette and role-playing follow. The teacher may encourage other versions of some topics.

7. Students see and understand the whole video cassette.

8. Extensive discussion of the film on video, including non-verbal language.

9. The proof that the student has fully understood the tape is to ask him if he has. I do not doubt that seeing and hearing is the best way to learn a foreign language. Are they not also the way we learned our native tongue?

Students' Evaluation.

1. They liked the variety of speakers, people of all ages and from all parts of France and Germany, with various social backgrounds. Difficult for them were familiar expressions and some points of grammar that had to be explained.

2. They were glad to discuss in their own words what they had observed.

3. They wanted to learn more history, philosophy and geography in order to understand the life and times projected in the film. Foods, lifestyles, education were also discussed.

4. Differences and similarities between societies were debated.

5. Observations of generational conflict brought about considerable debate.

6. Non-verbal language, such as proxemics, kinetics, and body language brought about considerable debates. Most students had not been acquainted with non-verbal language at all and became very interested about the meaning of some gestures. Another focal point was youth culture.

Over-all Impression

The over-all impression is that discussions were much more vivid with video films than with books, and students contributed interesting observations for discussion on their own and without solicitation from the teacher.

It was also arranged for students to meet together, without the teacher, to continue their discussions outside of class. In this case, the most advanced students served as discussion leaders, but there were also disagreements and occasional rivalry; individuals enjoyed the challenge - akin to the competition to gain mastery in sports - to understand a film in a foreign language and discuss it in that language. It requires an effort to learn it. There is the question of whether they wish to do it. If they are motivated, they will study the vocabulary list that they must know before they see the film and they will also listen to the tapes several times to improve their pronunciation and get ready for the discussions. Some learn how to imitate certain actors very well

and memorize key sentences to impress their peers with play-acting or even putting on a brief play of their own based on the film.

However, most individuals are not theatrically inclined and at first become the audience.But even some students who are timid at the beginning provide some entertaining contributions after a while. Occasionally there is a memorable gesture learned from the film. Once the natural impulse to play games becomes active, students are fast to improve in inventiveness and imagination as well as in ability to express themselves in the foreign language. They enjoy their progress and do not mind working harder.

Nevertheless, there will always be some less successful students and some prolonged silences in the debates. To avoid an embarrassing silence in class or too much merriment about a speaker who cannot think of the right word in French or German, the teacher has to show the student how to talk around it. One student, for example, did not know the word for ladder. Instead, he said that you use the object for picking apples or other fruit from trees. When he says this in French, it is perfectly acceptable. This method can even add amusement to a serious class hour. We can make the search for a word look like a puzzle or a mystery story and involve the whole class in the search. Offer a choice of questions: Is it an object or a person, an idea or an activity, a place or a moment in time? Where in the film is there another reference to the same object? It is a way to solicit everybody's participation. After various definitions it becomes clear how the puzzle can be solved.

As far as teaching content is concerned, there is no equivalent to the authentic, living foreign culture of video film. I have seen students enthusiastic and excited when they viewed a performance of a Cocteau film or Molière play, performed by the Comédie Française or watched a documentary about student life in Paris. This brings foreign culture into our classroom, visible to everyone. Excitement can be added by letting students replay an event they have just seen. There is no limit to what we can do to solicit additional readings and assignments on topics suggested by video films with content and form of high quality.

Films are also interesting from the viewpoint of the filmmaker's art. How does a filmmaker - Cocteau, for instance - shape script and photography into his specific artistic construct?

We can evidently learn a great deal from video cassettes about France, its people, geography, history, politics and - very much - cinematography. Coincidentally, we also learn a great deal about human beings in general and immerse ourselves for a while in the French or German language and civilization. The Chinese are right, "a picture is worth a thousand words."